

## California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley

### Transportation / Highway 99

#### **Background**

Economic activity is mobile. It travels on rails; it comes through ports and airports and on the tires of 18 wheelers. Commuters move from home to work and spend increasingly long periods of time on the highways. Highway 99, from Bakersfield through San Joaquin County carries more than a million vehicles a day and is the backbone of central California – Highway 99 is California's Main Street.

In 2001, a group of regional leaders met and identified three priorities to promote an innovative economy within the region. The first priority was to convert Highway 99 from the San Joaquin Valley's "back alley" to its "Main Street." From this initiative, the Highway 99 Task Force was created. Focus on the corridor has since broadened and currently includes three parallel activities, and hundreds of interested individuals and agencies.

#### **I. Highway 99 Task Force:**

The Highway 99 Task Force was created in 2002 as a regional strategy to improve economic development and job creation. The Task Force recognized that first, and often lasting, impressions of the San Joaquin Valley were based on the image of the region seen from a car while driving down Highway 99. The Task Force set about improving both the function and appearance of the highway.

The Highway 99 Task Force now has more than 134 participants and their work has produced three documents: *Route 99 Corridor Improvement Guide*; *Corridor of Opportunity: Highway 99 as a Catalyst for Economic and Community Progress*; and *The Future of Rest: A Proposal to Promote Regional Economic Development through Rest Area Improvement*. Current projects include translating corridor "theme" concepts into elements to be incorporated into new projects and transforming the Tipton and Turlock rest stops into pilot projects for the 21st Century rest area concept. Theme design is anticipated to be complete by January, 2006. GVC is working with Coach Connect to incorporate WiFi hotspots and a traveler information portal and kiosks into those rest stops by November, 2005.

Future projects based on the Corridor of Opportunity report, could include community assistance in design and use of benchmarking and measuring local and regional economic impacts from transportation investments. There are currently legislative and regulatory barriers to commercial activities within the highway right of way, which prevents generating any revenue for upgrades, maintenance or security. This is a barrier to the redesign and more effective use of rest areas along the corridor.

## **II. Highway 99 Master Plan & Business Plan:**

Caltrans, working with the Task Force which includes the eight San Joaquin Valley COGS, developed and has submitted to Secretary McPeak the Route 99 Master Plan for the segment of the corridor from Stockton to Bakersfield. The plan emphasizes safety and capacity as most important for the expenditure of public funds, and identifies more than \$6B in projects. The plan, which has received significant stakeholder input, also addresses corridor enhancement elements. The Route 99 Corridor Master Plan will strengthen community identity, unify freeway improvements, and develop design concepts that tie communities through the San Joaquin Valley together and foster a valley-wide identity while increasing safety and capacity.

At the direction of the Secretary, Caltrans will work with GVC and the Task Force to develop a Business Plan to guide implementation of the Master Plan. A draft of the scope and content of the Business Plan is attached to this document. Using a subcommittee of the Task Force comprised of seven SJV COG Directors (Kings County does not contain any portion of Highway 99 within its boundary), a list of projects, their initial and life cycle costs, potential funding sources, and their priority as agreed to by the COGs in the affected counties will be completed by December of 2005.

## **Interstate Status**

During the past several months, at the direction of the Secretary, GVC has facilitated discussions regarding the possibility of designation of the San Joaquin Valley portion of the Highway 99 corridor as part of the Federal Interstate System and as a “High Priority Corridor”. Currently, there is consensus among the affected COGs and other stakeholders that California should enter into negotiations with the US Department of Transportation to grandfather Highway 99 into the federal Interstate Highway System if waivers for any federal interstate standards that don’t contribute to the safety or capacity of the corridor can be obtained, and there is a financial advantage to inclusion. The designation is sought in an attempt to receive additional federal funding and because of the belief that interstate status brings an economic benefit to the region. The federal transportation bill now contains language to include Highway 99 as a “High Priority Corridor” that would make it eligible for additional funding from an annual Congressional appropriation. The Highway 99 Task Force and the Interstate Stakeholders Group now combined into a single entity are to meet in September to determine next steps in light of federal action, if any, on the transportation bill.

## **Summary**

These three programs are proceeding concurrently, each coordinated with and complementary to the others. Recommendations:

The Partnership will review and comment, and recommend to the Governor the SR99 business plan. Great Valley Center and Caltrans will jointly coordinate this effort which should be complete by January of 2006.

The Partnership will review and oversee the content and status of negotiations regarding Interstate designation for Highway 99.

The Partnership will develop a model, using commercial activity at rest stops, to increase tourism interest in the region as an economic development strategy, and to allow for the improved development of amenities and facilities at the Highway 99 “21st century rest stops” .

The Partnership will identify other transportation priorities for consideration such as high speed rail and east west route enhancement.

The partnership will identify and recommended statutory changes which can best assist in the development of a overall regional transportation plan.

The Great Valley Center, Caltrans, the Highway 99 Task Force and a liaison with the California Transportation Commission will provide staff support for this effort.

**Available publications:**

- Route 99 Corridor Improvement Guide
- Corridor of Opportunity: Highway 99 as a Catalyst for Economic and Community Progress
- The Future of Rest: A Proposal to Promote Regional Economic Development through Rest Area Improvement
- Caltrans DRAFT Master Plan and DRAFT Highway 99 Business Plan Outline
- Governor’s letter to Congressional Delegation re Interstate Status